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**On Writing “The Death of Us”**

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**On Writing “The Death of Us”**

by

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## **On Writing “The Death of Us”**

by

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This report details the writing and revision process that went into my thesis feature screenplay, *The Death of Us*, a romantic comedy about a young man who fakes his mother’s death to try to keep his girlfriend from dumping him. I trace my steps from the idea’s conception to the completion of my thesis draft of the screenplay, using the outlines and beat-sheets I created at various stages along the way as examples. I explain the circumstances and inspirations behind *The Death of Us*, and finally, I attempt to reconcile the giant gap between my original intentions for this script and the final product.

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## Chapter 1: A Recipe for a Rom-Com Premise

It never occurred to me that faking your mother's death to keep a girl from dumping you was that extreme. This was months ago. I was dating a girl who I was willing to go to extremes for. Maybe not fake my mother's death, but definitely hold a boombox over my head or do something romantic in the rain.

I'd been watching *Say Anything* and *High Fidelity* a lot.

So that's the headspace I was in when I started playing a game, which was: Imagine what I would do if I found out my girlfriend was dumping me tomorrow. It was a weird, morbid game. The first thing I thought was I'd just plan out the most romantic day I could so (best case scenario) I'd win her back with my romance, or (more likely scenario) I'd have a nice day to look back on when it was all over.

But then I realized I was thinking too small. Why settle for one nice day when you could have a whole week, maybe even a month? That's one month's time you could spend making the girl fall in love with you all over again. How do you buy yourself that time? Just tell her your mom died. No one would dump a guy whose mom just died. To pull it off, all you need is a mother and no conscience. If you play it right, you don't even need the mother.

At this point, I was no longer thinking about my own girlfriend, I was imagining a romantic comedy: *A guy finds out his girlfriend is going to dump him, so he tells her his mom died to buy himself more time.* I tried to let the idea snowball from there. *But he doesn't expect to actually have to go to the funeral because he hasn't talked to his parents in years. His girlfriend insists they go to the funeral so he can get some closure.*

*They road-trip to the funeral.* The snowball stopped there. I'd been looking for an excuse to write a romantic road trip comedy, and here it was.

So as far as creative process goes, there were a few ingredients:

I had a girlfriend.

I had a mother.

I wanted to write a romantic road trip movie.

John Cusack.

I guess the fifth ingredient was I had a feeling my girlfriend was going to dump me soon, and it turned out I was right.

## Chapter 2: How to Blame a Bad Outline on an Ex-Girlfriend

I got dumped about a week before I started workshopping this idea. The very first thing my peers told me in workshop was anyone who would fake their mother's death just for some girl was crazy. I'd totally been considering it for about a week, so it seemed like I was ready to write this story.

However, I was quickly talked out of the idea of it being a road trip movie. While I had something more indie and dark in mind, the workshop pictured my idea, which I'd pitched as a single-sentence logline, as something broader and more akin to *Meet the Parents*. I love that movie, and its script is fantastic. I noted that the script doesn't spend half of act two with Ben Stiller and his girlfriend travelling to her parents' house. No, we cut straight from the airport in Chicago to the couple pulling up to the front door. In other words, we cut straight to the most interesting part. In my case, the most interesting part was the fake funeral (I was told), not the road-trip-slash-emotional-journey. It's certainly not what I originally had in mind, but I decided to get on board with this new vision for my logline. I studied *Meet the Parents* and also *Wedding Crashers* by breaking them down scene by scene and identifying their plot points.

I felt particularly compelled to study those two movies because they feature a male protagonist whose overarching goal is to win the heart of a woman. In order to accomplish those goals, the protagonists lie their asses off. In *Meet the Parents*, Ben Stiller lies to impress the father of the woman he wants to marry. In *Wedding Crashers*, Owen Wilson pretends to be someone else to buy himself time with a woman he's fallen head over heels for. The ruses these two protagonists concoct in the name of love create



a lot of potential for comedy, often as a result of the protagonist nearly being caught in one of his lies. The constant lying digs a deeper and deeper hole for the protagonist. Then, at the act two break, the truth comes out, and the protagonist loses the love of his life. To win her back (in act three) he must dig himself out of the hole he dug telling lies.

I was satisfied to use these films as examples because my premise seemed to fit into this structure fairly well. My protagonist, who I named Mitch Scarborough, lies to his girlfriend to keep her from dumping him. One thing leads to another, the lie snowballs, and Mitch must stage a fake funeral for his mother to keep up appearances. The comedy would be mined from the pains Mitch would have to go to in order to maintain his lie. And like my example films, I had the truth finally come out at the second act break, leaving Mitch to win his way back into his love's good graces in the third act. It seemed to fit so perfectly.

Unfortunately, when I started outlining, I (slowly) realized I was still holding on to ideas that belonged to the indie/darker/road trip version of this script, not the broader/*Meet the Parents* version. If you look at the outline I've included (Appendix A), you'll see a number of storylines that are nowhere to be found in the second draft of the script. For example, in the first outline, Mitch's father has terminal cancer (the irony being he is really dying while his son is faking his mother's death), and he dies in the third act. Kind of dark for a comedy.

Other examples:

A. Mitch and company spend one night before the funeral camping. It doesn't make much sense for the story. Now, I realize I was trying to fit some ideas I'd imagined for the road trip into the camping sequence. This sequence was one of the first to go.

B. Mitch's father owns the hotel, where Mitch and company stay for one night. It's also where the funeral was held. After his father dies, Mitch takes over this hotel in the third act, fixes it up, and gets it back on its feet financially. Restoring the hotel proves to Mitch's girlfriend that he has matured.

C. Mitch's girlfriend is not only dumping him, she also has a suitor who she plans on sleeping with as soon as she dumps Mitch. This suitor character (who I named Dom) was going to be the central antagonist. Later, it would be pointed out to me that the parents are a much more natural set of antagonists.

D. The reason Mitch hadn't spoken to his parents in ten years was his father cheated on his mother by sleeping with Mitch's high school girlfriend. Again, pretty dark for a comedy.

E. Mitch and his girlfriend fake their own deaths at the end. Also, Mitch married the high school girlfriend who slept with his dad at the end. A lot of stuff happened at the end that didn't make much sense.

F. Mitch had a younger sister who was sleeping with her married college professor. If you're keeping track, that's two cases of a married man cheating with a much younger woman.

G. Mitch's girlfriend's suitor sleeps with Mitch's sister. I know that's vague, but it doesn't matter because it's so far removed from the most recent draft of the script. It was just too much.

So I blame a lot of the missteps in the first outline on the fact that half of me still wanted to be writing the indie, dark road trip movie. But mostly, I blame my missteps on the fact that I'd just been dumped by the girl who inspired the whole idea for the script in the first place, so writing a perfect, happy romantic comedy was a harder pill to swallow than I'd anticipated.

And that's how you blame a bad outline on an ex-girlfriend.

### **Chapter 3: The Dad Can't Sleep with a High-Schooler**

Out of all the love triangles in my outline, my workshop found the one between Mitch, his father, and his high school girlfriend to be the most appalling. I should have taken a note out of *American Beauty*'s book: even if the whole movie is about a dad who wants to have sex with a high-schooler, the dad can't have sex with a high-schooler. I pitched a version where she'd just graduated from high school and she was definitely eighteen, but no one cared—I'd already crossed a line. The line also had something to do with the dad needing to be a redeemable character, and sleeping with your son's girlfriend is apparently unredeemable.

I was learning so much.

This is screenwriting.

The whole point of the dad sleeping with the high-schooler was to give Mitch a reason to be mad at his parents. He was upset with his dad for obvious reasons and upset with his mom for staying with his dad, despite what'd happened. Personally, I needed Mitch to despise his parents for two reasons: 1) so I could explain why his girlfriend had never been introduced to them after dating Mitch for three years, and 2) so Mitch having to work together with his parents to stage a fake funeral would feel like a completely insurmountable task.

But fine, no affairs with high-schoolers. After brainstorming other reasons to excommunicate your parents, I eventually settled on a replacement: Mitch's parents were stage-parents. They forced him to do commercials, singing competitions, etc. His dad was the money-hungry manager, and his mother was the acting coach, choreographer,

voice coach, etc. They even got Mitch involved in a mid-level boy band as a teenager. At a gig opening for LFO, 13-year-old Mitch experienced his first orgasm on stage in front of thousands of screaming tweenage fans. And for this, he resented his parents.

If they didn't like affairs with high-schoolers, that would have to do. I wish I'd known that this boy band storyline would end up taking over half of the script.

## Chapter 4: Cancer and Killing Cats

So I pretty much threw my outline in the trash. My thirty-one page, impeccably detailed outline that was going to make the actual writing of the script a total breeze. It was painful, but I started over.

I dropped the sister character. I moved Mitch from Boulder, Colorado (did I mention he lived in Boulder? I've never been there. Why would I choose Boulder?) to Brooklyn. I retooled Dom, the suitor, into a different type of tool. I added the boy band stuff.

I kept the terminal cancer. They couldn't make me get rid of the cancer.

I wrote a much more bare bones outline this time. This outline began with Mitch accidentally killing a cat inside of a kick drum. The cat belongs to his bandmate's girlfriend. The bandmate was going to break up with his girlfriend but can't now that her cat just died. This gives Mitch an idea of how to buy more time with his own girlfriend.

Cancer and killing cats. I really know where the laughs are.

I at least had this version ending with a song and a proposal and a happily ever after. I was inching closer to achieving the *Meet the Parents/Wedding Crashers* ideal.

This is screenwriting. I'm patting myself on the back just for having come marginally close to sort of mimicking someone else's work. I soldier on.

## **Chapter 5: Do You Really Want to Hear About my Process?**

I bounce a tennis ball against the wall until I think of something worth typing.  
Sometimes I introduce tacos and coffee into this process.

I had my writer's assistant (iPhone) keep a record (search history) of everything I researched (googled) during the process of turning this idea into a screenplay. Here are some samples from the log: cheap wedding rings, cheap coffins, LFO, Lou Pearlman, terminal cancer, tacos, can blind people cry, creepiest celebrities, Woody Allen in a fat suit.

Somewhere in this process I began writing the first pages of the script.

## **Chapter 6: Let's Talk About That Dead Cat Again**

The only thing more boring than the process of writing a script—I mean you're really just sitting in front of a computer for hours; you might as well be doing your taxes—is me telling you about the process of writing a script. Just remember you asked for it.

I like to start a script off on something big. Everyone likes to do that. It's just good screenwriting. But I never felt like I had anything big enough to start this script with unless I started with Mitch finding out he's getting dumped right off the bat (which doesn't sound like such a bad idea right now). This lack of something big probably explains why I kill a cat in the first few pages. The cat crawls into a hole in a kick drum, and Mitch accidentally beats the drum with the cat in it. And in this manner, the cat meets its end.

Killing a cat is me as the writer desperately trying to make an impression. I guess it fits because it hits on the “death” theme, but a dead cat doesn't scream romance the way I needed it to. While I was trying to come up with a big opening, I was forgetting about more important things.

For example, the opening in my first draft is also missing a scene that demonstrates why Mitch and his girlfriend, Audrey, are meant for one another. A scene that will make a reader root for them to end up together, as this is essential to a reader's enjoyment of the script's conclusion. Second draft stuff.

Other first draft, first act problems include:



A. It takes too long to introduce Mitch's parents, and when they're finally introduced, it's through a telephone call. I knew better.

B. We spend too much time with Audrey's mother and sister when they barely play into the rest of the script at all.

C. Too much time spent in Mitch and Audrey's apartment. There's one kind of scene I hate writing (there's probably more than one), and that's any scene that takes place in an apartment, house, condo, etc. I despise writing anything that takes place in your standard kitchen, living room, bedroom, or dining room. Because of this, scenes I write in these locations tend to be uninspired. Unfortunately, this script calls for a lot of those kind of scenes. I'd need to minimize them in any way possible, which I already knew probably meant spending more time on the funeral and less time everywhere else.

D. And then there's the mannequin in the mittens thing.

## Chapter 7: A Very Sexy Mannequin

In the first draft of my script, there's a mannequin in a store window wearing mittens. The mannequin is bending down trying to take off her nylons with mittens on, one hand balancing against an invisible wall. Mitch stares at this mannequin sometimes when he misses Audrey because it reminds him of her nightly routine when she comes home from work. Every night, she leans against the wall and takes off her leggings in exactly the same pose. Somehow, this mannequin became the central image in the entire script. The mannequin's rise to prominence was a total accident, but here's where it started:

I was fortunate enough to win the University of Texas Department of Radio-Television-Film's Longhorn Screenplay Competition. As my reward, I received a trip to Los Angeles to pitch my script to a handful of managers, writers, and producers. While the entire experience was more valuable than I could have ever hoped, most of it has nothing to do with my thesis script, so I won't go into it here.

But one part is relevant. I didn't have a car during my time in Los Angeles, so I did a lot of walking in a city that isn't really designed for walkers. I was walking through Beverly Hills on the way to one of my "meetings" when I noticed a mannequin in one of the shop windows. This mannequin was posed with one hand pressed up against an invisible wall, keeping balance while the other hand reached to remove a stocking. I understand that it was just a mannequin, but it was one of the sexiest things I'd seen in a while. This was back when I was dating the girl that inspired *The Death of Us*. It was a long distance thing.

She was in Nashville.

I was in a weird place where mannequins were sexy.

Yet the image had such an impact on me that I wrote it down that day. I wrote a letter to my girlfriend from LA, and I almost told her about the mannequin. Ultimately, I decided I didn't feel secure enough in our relationship to start sharing stories that involved me being attracted to window displays. Rightfully so, it would turn out.

Because I have a hard time separating fiction and memoir, my attraction to the mannequin became Mitch's attraction to the mannequin. It led to a whole gag where Mitch's bandmate steals the mannequin from the store window because he wants to have sex with it. I added the mittens just for the sake of a couple half-jokes. The whole thing really went too far. It never made sense as part of the script in the first place. It was shoehorned in because the image struck me in real life, so I assumed it would be equally poignant in the script.

It was not, and I ditched the mannequin after the first draft. I'm certain it won't be the last time I shoehorn that image into something I write. It was a very sexy mannequin.

## **Chapter 8: I Find Solace in a Good Necrophilia Joke**

The second act of my first draft script is also chockfull of casualties—scenes, sequences, storylines, and characters that have since been cut. For example:

A. I spent a lot of time debating when the father should die. The low point? The midpoint? Act three? That time was wasted because I ended up slashing the cancer storyline entirely.

B. One of the major plotlines in the first draft was the father wanting to pass on the company into trustworthy hands before he died. This inspired a competition between Mitch and Dom, the unbearably cocksure agent character. However, this storyline would be thrown out with the cancer.

C. I did this odd thing in the first draft where I used sex to measure the progress of Mitch and Audrey's relationship. When she wasn't feeling him so much, she was sexually withholding. When she was falling back in love with him, she put out. This is how a caveman would write a romantic comedy. I've oversimplified it a bit, but it really did lead to some pointless scenes.

D. The dad's cancer also led to a storyline involving some medicinal marijuana. Audrey got high with the dad—it was a whole ordeal. Needless to say, that went in the trash with the cancer.

That said, allow me to pat myself on the back for a moment. Amid all the waste floating around in this script, I found some scenes worth keeping. For example:

A. I can be really hard on myself about this script (I had high expectations for it. This was the script that was going to really *say* something. This was going to be the one that made you think. Instead, it became a pretty solid premise for a broad, male-perspective romantic comedy. I'm okay with that. If I can get to a draft I'm satisfied with, I'll be very happy to have this as part of my portfolio), but this is one of the first first drafts where I felt like I'd at least nailed the plot points in one try.

I think I can attribute this partly to the analysis I did of my model films, specifically *Meet the Parents* and *Wedding Crashers*. Studying those films gave me a firm understanding of how a story like mine could/should be structured.

I can also attribute the sturdiness of my script's structure to the fact that this story felt like it already had some very natural, built-in plot points. As I described in chapter one, the bare bones structure came to me pretty quickly. If you recall, this is how the idea progressed: *A guy finds out his girlfriend is going to dump him, so he tells her his mom died to buy himself more time. But he doesn't expect to actually have to go to the funeral because he hasn't talked to his parents in years. His girlfriend insists they go to the funeral so he can get some closure.*

The inciting incident couldn't be more obvious, and since I'd narrowed the story down to the bare essentials, it's even the very first clause of my synopsis. *A guy [Mitch] finds out his girlfriend is going to dump him.*

Early on, I considered plotting the story out so the first act break would be the moment Mitch lies to Audrey by telling her his mom died. However, I ruled that option out because it would just take too long to get the ball rolling and get to the funeral if he

doesn't even tell her his mom died until around page thirty. It felt more natural to break the act at the moment Mitch has reached a point of no return with his lie. At the act break, he can either admit he made the whole thing about his mom up or take the plunge and commit to staging a fake funeral. Of course, he chooses the latter.

I divided act two into two halves. The first half was the time spent preparing for the funeral, and the second half was the funeral itself. Therefore, the midpoint became the start of the funeral. In order to make this a bigger moment, it's also the point when Mitch realizes what he thought was going to be a small gathering of close friends to mourn the loss of a loved one is actually a huge three-ring circus of a funeral. The stakes definitely spike up at this midpoint. Mitch now has to maintain his lie in front of a massive crowd of people and his increasingly suspicious girlfriend.

I never had any question about what the second act break would be. Honestly, part of what was so appealing to me about this story is the second act break is a total no-brainer. It's the moment when the truth finally comes out. Just when it looks like Mitch might have saved his relationship with Audrey, it all falls apart. It happens that way in *Meet the Parents* and *Wedding Crashers* for a reason. I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel.

B. I also came away from the first draft satisfied with at least a few of the gags. Mitch's mom gets trapped inside the coffin and very nearly buried alive. My workshop found this funny, and so did I. Happily, it remains intact in the second draft.

C. At the culmination of this trapped-in-the-funeral gag, Mitch runs into a couple gravediggers. His interaction with them spawns a runner about necrophilia that I'm also pleased with.

I can be hard on this script, but I find solace in a good necrophilia joke.

## **Chapter 9: If You Can't Blame Your Ex-Girlfriend, Blame Your Parents**

The story of the third act of my first draft is a familiar one. It involved a funeral for the dad and the return of a very sexy mannequin, so it mostly made its way into the trash.

But around the time I was writing the climax, which is predictably (for a romantic comedy) the moment when Mitch and Audrey end up together, happily ever after, etc., I found out my parents were getting a divorce after thirty years of marriage. This triggered a crisis of my faith in the romantic comedy genre.

To be fair, several of my favorite rom-coms of recent history and of all-time end on bum notes (i.e. the couple not ending up together). *Annie Hall* comes to mind. There are exceptions, but the vast majority of romantic comedies end with the two romantic leads together. They're extremely predictable in this way, yet I've always enjoyed them.

I'm convinced that in order to buy into the happy ending found in so many romantic comedies, there must also be a real-life romance that you buy into completely. In other words, the only way you'll really root for a perfect couple to end up together is if you believe perfect couples exist in real life.

I was no stranger to divorce. I grew up in the suburbs. A lot of people get divorced in the suburbs, just like a lot of people get divorce everywhere. But I always thought my parents were somehow immune to it. I bought into my parent's romance completely. I had one perfect real-life example that made all the fictional examples believable.



So I was writing the climax—the grand finale kiss—with my parents’ divorce on my mind. The scene felt like a lie. It was making my whole script seem false. Admittedly, I was probably being overdramatic, but you’re allowed a few dark days when your parents get divorced (if you’re a teenager, you’re allowed a few years). I toyed with the idea of Mitch and Audrey not ending up together. If nothing else, I thought, I could at least have the parents be divorced. The dad is already named after my dad anyway, and I kept accidentally using my mom’s name instead of the name for the mom I’d invented.

I could be accused of letting memoir wander into my fiction too often. You might even accuse me of letting it wander into this report. Sometimes that tendency can lead a writer, myself included, down a bad path. A writer will end up prioritizing what happened in real life over what’s made up rather than making the most compelling storytelling the priority.

I’m still in limbo. In the wake of my parents’ divorce, an unhappy ending feels more honest. But it’s a broad romantic comedy. It makes me sad, but the happy ending is probably the right choice for this story, and it stands in the second draft.

If my parents had just waited to get their divorce while I was writing a relationship drama, everything would’ve been coming up roses.

## **Chapter 10: A Cure for Cynicism**

There was a scene in the first draft that I actually liked, but it got cut anyway.

It's morning in Mitch and Audrey's apartment. She's in her pajamas, eating a bowl of cereal, and leaning against the kitchen counter. Mitch walks in. Audrey wordlessly grabs Mitch his own spoon. Mitch rips opens a couple packs of sugar and begins pouring the contents into Audrey's bowl.

"Just your half," she says.

Mitch obediently keeps the sugar to one side.

I like it because it's the most honest thing (to me) I've written during the entire process. Maybe the most romantic thing, too. If there's a cure for the cynicism brought on by a breakup and your parents' divorce, it's a girl willing to share her cereal with you.

## Chapter 11: Draft Two

In the beginning, a sexy mannequin was the central image of this script. Now, it's a dead cat. You bet that dead cat turned up in the outline for draft two. I trashed the things I already told you I trashed. Here's a selection of what I added/changed:

A. Paul, Mitch's bandmate, was a popular character when my first draft went through workshop, but he only turned up in a few scenes. He was also one of my favorite characters to write. My closest advisors suggested I bring Paul along to the funeral so he can help get Mitch stuck in bad situations. I took my advisors' suggestion and one-upped them by making Paul Mitch's brother to boot.

B. In the first draft, Mitch's parents lived in Los Angeles. His father ran a talent agency for children and teens like Will Smith's kids. My advisors pointed out that my knowledge of talent agencies for children and teens in Los Angeles was rather limited. Again, at the suggestion of my advisors, I changed Mitch's hometown to the other Hollywood—Hollywood, Florida! I reasoned that it made more sense for the story because Orlando, Florida was the hub for most boy band action around the turn of the century. Plus, I lived in Florida from age newborn baby to twelve. Write what you know. I understand Florida's brand of idiots better than California's. But I moved to California two months ago, and I'm learning fast.

C. I added a scene at the very beginning to address something that was lacking in the first draft. I mentioned previously that I had no scene in the first act that shows how perfect Mitch and Audrey are for each other, thus telling the audience to pull for them to get together for the whole movie. In *Meet the Parents*, it's Ben Stiller adorable failed

proposal—the second scene in the whole movie (first sequence really). I came up with a similar romantic gesture: buying his and hers cemetery plots. Mitch takes Audrey on a tour of the cemetery where he has purchased the spot where they'll be buried together when they die. It's supposed to be an adorably misguided stab at romance. It's on theme, but I don't love it. I think it's option B, and I'll look for option C in the next draft.

D. I made an effort to introduce Mitch's boy band past earlier in the script, rather than trying to hide the ball on that detail. Whereas I had him spill the beans about the boy band in early act two of the first draft, I have him tell the story of opening for LFO early in act one in the second draft (In draft 2.1, Mitch's old boy band is introduced in the very first scene in the form of a "Behind the Music"-type piece on TV).

E. I compressed and streamlined everywhere I could (while still managing to accidentally lengthen and drag on in other places). In the first draft, I had a scene dedicated to shopping for caskets and another entire scene dedicated to shopping for headstones, which I combined into one scene in the second draft.

F. I played up Lorraine's desire to be a famous actress, singer, whatever. In this draft, it's the whole reason she agrees to participate in faking her own funeral in the first place. It also leads her to try to don disguises and play other characters so she can spend more time with Mitch and Audrey. This desire is also what makes her scheme for an open casket wake. Finally, it's this same desire that explains why Lorraine was such an aggressive stage-mom when Mitch was younger—if she couldn't be famous, she'd make sure her son was.

G. Act three of the second draft is made of almost entirely new material. In this draft, the climax takes place at a “reunion show” for Mitch and Paul’s band. This reunion show is part of a grand gesture that shows Mitch he is a family man worth settling down with after all. He also gets Jeremy a record deal as his new agent. Again, this is meant to show Mitch’s transformation from slacker dude with no job and no ambition to professional but still fun grown-up with a real job—someone suitable for marriage. Romantic comedies reinforce traditional values. The romantic leads end up together. Everyone lives happily ever after.

Without adding too many pages, I wanted Mitch to have to try harder/do more to earn Audrey’s love in the third act. In my first draft, most of what brings Audrey and Mitch back together in the end is brought on by outside forces. He does show two major signs of being a changed man by caring for his dad in his dying days, bonding with his mom, and taking over his father’s business. However, most of these changes either take place in a montage or off screen. Once he’s changed, Audrey shows up and everything works out very conveniently.

In my second draft, I tried to preserve all of those major changes in Mitch. He still takes some responsibility in his dad’s company, thus showing ambition. He still has mended a relationship with his parents that seemed beyond repair. But in this draft, Audrey doesn’t fall into his lap as easily as she does in draft one. Mitch has to go to an effort to even get her in the same room as him. It all comes down to trying to make things as hard as possible on my protagonist. I think the third act of my second draft is an

improvement, but things could definitely stand to be more difficult for Mitch in future drafts.

## **Chapter 12: 3NAGERS**

What's missing from this second draft is anything that feels remotely real or relatable to me. Somehow, in crafting what I thought was an interesting, unique, and humorous back-story for Mitch, I created a monster that threatens to destroy the entire script. I'm talking, of course, about Mitch's past in a mid-level boy band. I named them 3NAGERS. Like "threenagers." Because they were three teenagers.

Making Mitch a former boy band member meant making his father the manager and his mother the overbearing stage-mom. It meant making Dom the agent at the father's talent agency (and a fellow boy band member in the second draft). It meant introducing a storyline about Mitch taking over his father's talent agency. It meant a reunion show storyline, too. The point is I added so much fat to the story all in the name of giving Mitch an appropriate reason to resent his parents.

Statistically speaking, the average parents give their children a reason to resent them at least once a week.

But the boy band monster presented a couple of problems. First, it required me to spend a lot of time and pages writing about something that really has nothing to do with what this script is supposed to be about. As simply put as possible, it's about a guy faking his mother's funeral, but if you look at the distribution of pages/scenes, the script makes it look like it's equal parts about a boy band and a fake funeral. That wasn't my intention.

More importantly, I cannot relate to the boy band stuff whatsoever. How many people can? It does not feel real or relatable because it is such a unique situation. That

presents a problem for an audience. How can I expect them to care? I'm already asking them to buy into a fairly outlandish premise. On top of that, I now have to sell them on a world I know nothing about. As a writer, it also presents a problem for me because talent agencies and boy bands are just not something I'm very interested in writing about. Scenes or storylines involving the boy band in my drafts come off as uninspired and glossed over.

I have no one to blame but myself. It was completely my own idea. I thought it was the answer to all my problems. I committed to the boy band thing the same way I committed to writing this script as a broad comedy instead of a darker indie—it seemed to fit well, so I went with it.

Without the boy band thread, I would be left to focus on something I can relate to—something I believe any audience can relate to—and that's the relationship between Mitch and Audrey. Being stuck in a relationship that's going nowhere is more or less part of the human experience. It's universal. But the story of Mitch and Audrey's relationship frequently falls by the wayside in these early drafts of the script. In future drafts, I'm interested in finding a way to tell this story without any of the boy band stuff. I will miss some of the jokes it provided, but 3NAGERS continues to feel out of place in this script.



### **Chapter 13: Dead Cats, an Encore**

I have a tendency to blur the line between fiction and memoir.

For example, earlier in this report, when I was blurring the line between report and memoir, I changed the timeline of my relationship with my ex-girlfriend to make for a better story.

Another example: I killed a cat once. I ran it over completely by accident. It was one of the worst feelings I've ever felt in my life, like something was crushing my chest.

Not long after that, a car struck my own cat. I loved that cat. He was a stray that we'd taken in—me and my roommates. We named him Truman Capote on account of his demeanor and his taste in men.

It happened in the street right outside our house. We wrapped him in a towel, and I held him in my arms as we drove him to the vet. We buried him in the backyard and held a memorial service I suspect he would've enjoyed.

So I make jokes about a dead cat in a romantic comedy script.

This is screenwriting.

## Chapter 14: Michelangelo Wanted to Paint God and Adam High-Fiving

Let me tell you a completely made up anecdote about the screenwriters of *Wedding Crashers*.

Two dudes in their thirties, Steve Faber and Bob Fisher, have both just gone through nasty divorces. They're fed up with the whole institution of marriage, and they want the world to know about it. They decide to write a script that's really going to *say* something. It's about two guys in their thirties who have both just gone through really gnarly divorces, so they start crashing weddings to show everyone that love is a sham. Steve and Bob high-five each other—that'll show their ex-wives.

They take it out to pitch at a studio. They begin, "It's called *Wedding Crashers*."

The studio honcho interrupts.

"About two guys in their thirties who crash weddings to get laid? But then one of them falls for a bridesmaid and realizes maybe love's not such a sham after all? We love it. Let's have a draft in two weeks. Janet, get me Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn on the phone."

And the rest is history.

All I'm saying is there can be a very large gap between what a screenwriter originally intended for an idea and what turns up in a final draft. There's usually even a substantial gap between original intentions and first outline. That's not necessarily a bad thing. I'm trying to learn to embrace the gap. *Wedding Crashers* is an A+ romantic comedy in my book.

When Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he originally intended for God and Adam to be high-fiving. But instead, the powers that be forced him to paint a limp-wristed Adam with his finger sniffing around God's finger. So bitter Michelangelo was stuck just lying there on scaffolding, flat on his back, cursing this godforsaken masterpiece as paint dripped down from the ceiling onto the shirt *he just bought*.

Maybe that's true, maybe it isn't. But that's how you compare your thesis script to a High Renaissance masterpiece.

## **Chapter 15: California Donuts**

I wrote the first draft in Austin. The second draft I wrote in Los Angeles. Koreatown, specifically. This is relevant because the change of scenery necessitated some amendments to my writing process.

Koreatown is not so much known for their abundance of breakfast tacos like the east side of Austin. In Austin, there were no less than four establishments selling high-quality breakfast tacos within a three-minute walk from my front door. Therefore, a lot of tacos invaded my process.

In Koreatown, it's the donuts. Coffee and donuts available at any time, day or night. I was heavily under their influence while writing a bloated second draft.

This is screenwriting.

## **Chapter 16: Sometimes I Feel Like All My Scripts Should Just Be *Seinfeld* Specs**

As I write outline after outline, then draft after draft, I realize how many possible versions of the same script there could be. One version was the dark indie comedy; the other was the broad rom-com. I could write a version of this same premise as a *Seinfeld* episode.

George fakes his mother's death in order to buy more time with a woman he's fallen for. Kramer winds up trapped inside the casket and nearly buried alive. Jerry tries out some new material at the wake before an appearance on Letterman. Elaine brings a snack.

Here's a slightly different, less *Seinfeld*-y idea for a third draft. It appeals to me because it involves no boy bands:

We open with the same scene from the first draft where Mitch has purchased a cemetery plot for him and his girlfriend as a romantic gesture. She was hoping for something more along the lines of a proposal.

Mitch's parents have been divorced since he was a teenager. They got divorced when he caught his parents cheating on each other. As a result, he's disillusioned with love and doesn't believe in the institution of marriage. Mitch's girlfriend, Audrey, is afraid this relationship is going nowhere. When Mitch discovers her plan to dump him in the near future, he lies and tells her his mother died to buy more time with her.

But he doesn't anticipate his girlfriend being so supportive that she insists she accompany him to the funeral (which would obviously be held in his hometown, where his mother was residing). It takes all the courage he can muster to call his mother, after

giving her the cold shoulder for so many years, and ask her to help him out with staging a fake funeral. To his surprise, she quickly agrees. She says she's just excited at any opportunity to see her son—it's been so long.

Mitch and Audrey arrive in Mitch's hometown. Mitch makes arrangements for his mother's funeral because there is no one else to do it—she died a lonely woman. His mom secretly sends an obituary to the newspaper, hoping to spread the word of her “death” to a woman that actually wants to kill her. Mitch's mom besmirched the sanctity of marriage once again by sleeping with a married man, and now the man's wife wants her dead. Mitch's mom agreed to the fake funeral so quickly because it seemed like a convenient way to get off the hook and save her neck.

The funeral begins with Mitch under the impression that it will be a short and sweet affair with a low attendance. He arrives to find a crowd of mourners. Some are former acquaintances of Mitch's mom. One is Mitch's old high school fling. Two others are the married man Mitch's mom recently slept with, and his out-for-blood wife. And another is Mitch's father, who saw the obituary and felt compelled to attend.

Mitch and his mother are both shocked to see his father. His father is even more shocked to learn that Mitch's mother is not actually dead. One thing leads to another, and Mitch's mother ends up trapped in the casket, about to be buried alive. Mitch asks his dad to distract Audrey while he rescues his mom. His dad distracts Audrey by offering her some medicinal marijuana. Audrey discovers the dad's secret—he has terminal cancer and he's dying. He came to the funeral hoping to reconnect with his son and make amends. Audrey feels terrible to learn that Mitch is losing not one, but two parents.

Mitch rescues his mother, but soon after, his secret comes out. Audrey learns the truth: Mitch's mother did not die; the funeral was a charade. Everyone was in on it but Audrey. She guesses that his father's terminal cancer was all part of the lie, but the father's terminal cancer is news to Mitch. Audrey dumps Mitch. She tells him not to call.

Mitch stays in his hometown with his mother and father. He helps his father in his dying days, as the three of them become a family again. His parents even start to fall in love again, or at least forgive one another for their mistakes.

Then, his father passes away. He attends the funeral. His mother's eulogy restores his faith in marriage/love.

Mitch publishes a fictional obituary in the NY Times describing how Audrey and Mitch went down in a blaze of glory together after being married for 60 years (*The Death of Us*). He writes a fictional account of the life they spent together, of the deep love they shared. It's an apology and an appeal for a second chance (she told him not to call). Audrey reads the obit. It's clearly the work of Mitch, up to something. It says a memorial for the couple will be held in the same cemetery where he purchased a cemetery plot for he and Audrey in act one. The memorial is to be held at magic hour, naturally. She shows up at the "memorial." Mitch formally introduces her to his mom. He explains that she wanted to be in attendance, and his father wishes he could be there. Mitch proposes to Audrey in front of the headstones he has had made for them that say husband and wife. She says yes.

So to recap: I'm bringing back the cancer.

## Chapter 17: A Donut and a Winky Face for the Road

It turns out my parents might not be getting divorced after all.

What was it all for?

Don't they know I had a crisis of faith in *an entire genre of film* because of what they put me through?

When they decided to maybe not get divorced, do you think they once stopped to think how this might affect subsequent drafts of my script? No, not once.

And on top of that, my ex-girlfriend has been sending me flirty text messages. I heard through the grapevine she might want to get back together.

What does she think she's doing?

How is that fair?

I'm trying to write a script here.

I have a tendency to cross-pollinate memoir and fiction, but this memoir stuff has become such a moving target.

I'm thinking about getting a cat.

This was the script that was supposed to *say* something, but I can't figure out what I'm trying to say. I can't decide if it's about a boy band or a fake funeral. I don't know if it's a romantic comedy or an episode of *Seinfeld*. I can't decide if the dad should die or not. Just because my ex-girlfriend wants to get back together, does that mean we're getting back together?

She sends me a text. It's a winky face.

I need a donut.



## **An Afterword In Which I Throw Everything Out And Start Over**

When I first came to grad school, I had a very specific idea about what kind of writer I was. My pre-grad school screenplays generally skewed toward dark comedy or indie comedy (whatever that means). But really, my focus prior to grad school was on writing fiction, which tended to be experimental and surreal. In other words, I fancied myself more of a Wes Anderson or Charlie Kaufman than a Judd Apatow.

That would all change in grad school. Or perhaps more accurately, it would all get much more confusing. The first feature screenplay I wrote at the University of Texas was a romantic comedy called *I Only Wanna Be With You*. It started out as what I imagined as my version of *Adventureland*, *American Graffiti*, or *Dazed and Confused*. It turned out to be something more akin to my version of *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*, a romantic comedy I've become extremely fond of. After that, I became much more obsessed with the idea of writing a perfect, mainstream comedy.

The next feature I wrote—which took place completely outside of class, during the summer between my first and second years of grad school—was a stoner/buddy action-comedy set during the Revolutionary War called *Weed The People*. It's what I would consider my version of *Pineapple Express*, a film much more entrenched in the Apatow camp than the Anderson/Kaufman camp. This was also around the time I began worshipping the *21 Jump Street* script, another mainstream comedy.

After that, I attempted to write my version of *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World* in an action-comedy called *Stryder Faces His Demons*. It's about an aging heavy metal drummer who attempts to get clean in order to win the heart of his high school

sweetheart, but first he must defeat the vicious demons of Sex, Drugs, and Rock n Roll. It's a weird idea, but deep down it still aims to be a mainstream comedy.

So after three semesters of graduate school, I'd become a broad comedy writer. It kind of just happened that way. I was always a diehard fan of those types of movies, but I never had the courage to actually attempt writing one. Now that I've tried my hand at the mainstream comedy script a few times, I can understand why I was hesitant to give it a try. It seems easy, but it's not. Writing jokes that can tango with an Apatow or Rogen/Goldberg script is probably impossible. The vast majority of my drafts of these scripts fell flat on their faces. A couple drafts I'm pleased with, but not finished with.

After writing so many broad comedies, I set out to do something different with the last feature screenplay I'd write at UT. I've already discussed at length in this report my original intention for *The Death of Us* to be a dark comedy rather than a broad comedy. However, that idea eventually transformed into yet another broad comedy.

Or at least, it would be a broad comedy for a couple of drafts. After finishing the second draft of my script, I thought I'd completed what would be my thesis draft. Then, I wrote this report. In writing this report, I worked through a lot of what I was struggling with throughout the process of working on this script. I came to see how the boy band storyline was weighing down the entire script. I came to understand that removing Scott's terminal cancer storyline and his death altogether might have made the script lighter like a mainstream comedy, but it also eliminated a lot of the heart that made the script work for me and allowed me to relate to what I was writing. Writing this report also allowed me to work out some issues I was dealing with concerning my parents'

relationship and my relationship with my ex-girlfriend. Both relationships were having a large influence on my script. And in making these discoveries as I wrote the report, I was able to come up with a possible vision for a third draft of my script, which I described in Chapter 16.

I was so taken with this new direction for my script—and so fortunate to have a new clarity of vision that came with the therapy of writing my thesis report—that I decided to make the third draft a reality and use it as my thesis draft instead. I made some slight adjustments to the mini-treatment I'd written in the report, and wrote a draft of almost entirely new material.

The resulting draft is the perfect marriage of the kind of writer I considered myself to be when I entered graduate school and the kind of writer I became. I'm not saying it's a perfect script by any means—it could still use several more drafts—but it's the perfect blend of the work I've done writing dark comedy and my attempts at more mainstream comedy. My draft maintains many of the gags that feel more aligned with something like *Meet the Parents*, while managing to inject some of the heart and emotional reality that I felt was lacking from even the first outline.

I feel as though I've learned to find a happy medium between following my own vision and trying to please everyone—a skill I surely picked up after two years of constant workshopping. I've learned that less is more (an expression I personally coined). And I learned that letting a little memoir leak into my fiction every once in a while might not be such a bad thing in moderation.

I'm content to let this report and this draft of *The Death of Us* represent the summation of my experiences—both the successes and the failures—during my time in Austin.

## Appendix: Draft Zero Step Outline

### ACT I

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY / INT. BUICK ENCLAVE - DAY

We see a car winding its way down a stretch of remote road which hugs the side of a cliff. On the other side of the road, waves slam against rocks 100 feet below.

Inside the car, a YOUNG COUPLE can't wipe the giant smiles from their faces. The girl wears an engagement ring on her finger. No dialogue. They lean in for a kiss as they approach a sharp turn.

WIDE SHOT: Without warning, the car careens off the road and plummets into the ocean.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JEWELRY STORE - DAY

In Boulder, MITCH (26, one half of the young couple) shops for engagement rings with his sister, CAMILLE (20). Mitch can barely afford anything in the store thanks to his current unemployment. Camille reminds him he's already behind on rent, which is crucial for both of them. As they browse the rings, Camille off-handedly mentions that their mom would probably pass down her engagement ring if Mitch asked. Mitch scoffs. He hasn't spoken to his parents in five years and he's not going to start now.

Mitch finally settles on a ring. It's modest but beautiful and distinct -- not the most expensive price tier but still breaking the bank for Mitch. The STORE OWNER (a large, intimidating man with an accent that feels vaguely mafia-ish) rings him up. Mitch tries one credit card. Denied. The shop owner looks concerned. Mitch goes for another credit card. This one works. The shop owner smiles, and jokingly threatens Mitch that if it turns out he can't pay, he'll send his boys after him. Mitch walks away unsure how to take that comment but with ring in hand.

Establish Mitch and Audrey have been together 4 years.

INT. BLAIR FINANCIAL - DAY

In a Denver high-rise office, AUDREY (26, the other half of the young couple) follows close on the heels of DOM BLAIR (late 30's). Working as his assistant, she takes notes as he lists off tasks for her to take care of. At the end of the list, he lowers his voice, leans in closer to Audrey, and asks her if she's done what they talked about yet.

She promises it will be done by the end of the night.  
Satisfied, Dom gives her a key and lets her head home early.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mitch and Camille return home from ring shopping. Camille plops down on the couch, which has been her bed ever since their parents cut her off for sleeping with her professor at UC-Boulder. Mitch goes over his plan to surprise Audrey in the bedroom with the ring when she gets home from work. Camille smoking weed on their couch the whole time is not part of his plan, so he kicks her out.

On her way out, Camille tries to cast some doubt in Mitch -- "Is Audrey really the one? I never hear you guys having sex." Mitch pushes her out the door, promising he's certain that Audrey is the woman he wants to spend the rest of his life with.

INT. AUDREY'S CAR - DAY

Audrey commutes home from Denver to Boulder in her brand new Buick Enclave. She speaks to her mother on her cell phone. She explains what she's looking for in a man. She needs someone she can start a family with -- financially stable, driven, has a job, has a car. Mitch doesn't even speak to his parents, she complains. Dom, on the other hand, is all of those things, and he could really help her out career-wise.

As commuter traffic gets aggressive, Audrey becomes extremely protective of her new car. This Buick is her baby.

Outside, clouds are rolling in.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mitch practices his proposal on one knee. Rose petals litter the bed. Lit candles illuminate the room. He's interrupted by the sound of the front door shutting. She's home earlier than he expected. He fixes his hair and prepares for the big moment.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Audrey tosses her things down, still on the phone and relieved to find her apartment empty for once. She tells her mom she's going to break up with Mitch as soon as she sees him. The feeling just isn't there for her anymore.

She thanks her mom ("I don't know what I'd do without you"), before hanging up.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mitch, devastated, scrambles to abort the proposal before Audrey discovers him in the bedroom. He stashes the ring in its box in his pocket. He disposes of the rose petals. He blows out the candles, nearly setting off the smoke alarm. He pulls the smoke detector down from the ceiling before it can go off. He sneaks out the window and onto the fire escape.

He gets out just in time. Audrey enters the bedroom to find it empty and more or less in order. She puts the smoke detector back in place, blaming it on one of the two stoners she lives with.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

**(Inciting Incident)**

Mitch pretends to be just arriving home. He tries to keep on a brave face in front of Audrey, but he's too heartbroken. Tears well in his eyes. Audrey asks what's wrong. "My mom just died," Mitch admits.

EXT. TBD - DAY

Mitch begs Camille to go along with his lie. He just needed to buy himself more time with Audrey before she dumped him, so he can remind her they're soulmates. There's no way Audrey will ever find out because his parents are practically dead to him already. He'd never go to the funeral anyway. He just needs Camille to act like their mom just died.

Camille agrees to go along with it, but only if he'll finally tell her what he has against their parents. Mitch is about to go into the story, but we cut out before we can hear any of it.

INT. BLAIR FINANCIAL - DAY

Audrey breaks the news to Dom -- she can't meet up with him later because she can't dump a guy who just lost his mom. Dom accuses her of stalling. She promises she's not in love with Mitch, but she just couldn't do that to a person. She'll go to the funeral with him, let him get some closure, and her conscience will be clear. Then, she and Dom can finally be together.

He makes her promise she won't sleep with Mitch anymore. She promises. She dips out so she can go home and take care of it.

EXT. BLAIR FINANCIAL - DAY

As Audrey leaves work, a high-dollar sports car tails her.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Camille excitedly discusses her plan to use the information she just received from Mitch (still unknown to us) as leverage against her parents -- this is what she needs to get back in school and get back with her professor/lover.

Audrey returns to find Mitch and Camille getting high together. She's strongly put off by it. Mitch apologizes, and uses the excuse that their mom did just die, so...

Audrey insists they go to the funeral. Mitch points to the weather report on TV -- they're about to get hit with an epic snowstorm. Flights are grounded indefinitely. Audrey reluctantly offers to drive her Buick. "All the way to California? In a snowstorm?" Mitch asks. Camille betrays Mitch: "This way we can all ride together." Mitch can't say no.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - DAY

Mitch corners Camille in the bathroom. He demands to know why she would turn against him like that? She reveals she wants this little funeral/reunion to happen. That way she can confront them in person about what she now knows (again, still unknown to the audience).

Mitch, panicking, decides he better call his parents and get them on board just in case. He takes a deep breath before dialing the number.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Mitch's parents, SCOTT and MICHELLE (late 50's), wait in a hospital room. They're shocked to see Mitch's incoming call on Michelle's cell phone.

WE INTERCUT THE PHONE CONVERSATION, as Mitch uncomfortably explains the situation he's found himself in. Michelle immediately doesn't like Audrey -- any woman who doesn't want to marry her son is a moron.



He asks them if they'll stage a tiny, intimate funeral (just the four of them) to help him out. His parents are understandably hesitant. They try to barter for an extended visit from their son, but Mitch can't stand the idea. Ultimately, Scott and Michelle refuse. Mitch angrily promises they'll never hear from him again.

We remain in the hospital room after Mitch hangs up. A DOCTOR enters with a somber air about him. He informs Scott he has terminal cancer, and he has anywhere from a month to a year to live.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mitch reports back to Audrey. The storm looks really bad. They're predicting the roads are going to be blocked off for awhile. They better not risk it and just wind up stuck out on the highway. But Audrey won't take that excuse, she needs a clear conscience to get out of this relationship. If they leave right now, they can make it.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Mitch tries to hide his grin as he sits behind the wheel of Audrey's Buick with Audrey in the passenger seat and Camille in the back. Both the traffic and the weather are terrible and only getting worse. It's a logjam as countless drivers try to get out of town before the weekend. To Mitch's annoyance, the driver a few cars behind him won't stop honking. Audrey turns around to see the offender -- it's Dom. She sends a text on the sly: "What are you doing?" Dom texts back: "I'm gonna tell him. That way he's mad at me, not you." The traffic grinds to a halt, but Audrey sees Dom working his way on foot through the traffic. She orders Mitch to switch spots with her. She climbs behind the wheel and impressively weaves her way through traffic in the storm. They make their escape out of the city and away from Dom.

EXT. TBD

Scott tries Michelle to go along with the funeral so that he can see his son again before he dies. Michelle psychoanalyzes the whole thing. Scott is very morose. Cut out on the moment of decision.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

On the other side of the snowstorm, Mitch, Audrey, and Camille make a pit stop. Audrey goes off to use the bathroom, while Mitch conspires with Camille.

He's really dug himself in deep. They're on their way to a funeral that doesn't exist. He decides they just can't make it there. He pops the hood of Audrey's precious Buick and makes some blind adjustments in hopes that the car will break down. Camille is terrified that he just cut the brakes and will get them all killed.

Just then, Scott and Michelle call. They agree to help with the fake funeral, but they want a four-day visit from Mitch. Mitch says he'll cover all the expenses, but his parents offer to instead. Mitch puts his foot down -- he doesn't want to owe his parents anything. They'll hold the funeral on Sunday, but they expect to spend time with him before that.

Mitch considers just following through with sabotaging the trip, but Camille begs him to agree to their parents' conditions. She wants to get there so she can follow through with her blackmail scheme. She reminds Mitch he's only bought himself a little bit of time with Audrey -- she's still going to dump him eventually. He shouldn't go back to snowy, gloomy Boulder where she'll just be reminded of all the reasons she wants to dump him. He should take her to sunny California -- he can turn the entire trip into a romantic getaway to rekindle the fire. They'll be engaged by the end of the trip. That idea doesn't sound half bad to Mitch. He agrees and hastily tries to fix what he messed up under the hood. He ends up with grease all over his hands. He tells his parents he's coming, but they shouldn't expect him to stay in the house.

#### INT. GAS STATION - DAY

Mitch buys condoms and the best bottle of wine the gas station has to offer -- everything he needs for a romantic getaway. His mother calls back, this time without Scott. She wants to know if it can be an open casket funeral, so people can see her and remark at how good she looks even in death. Mitch is astounded. Of course the casket will remain closed because she's not going to be in it. Even if it were open, no one would see her because they're not inviting people. Her task is just to lay low for the weekend. Michelle doesn't like the sound of that.

#### INT. BUICK ENCLAVE - DAY

They climb back into the car. Audrey notices the grease on his hands. He wipes it off guiltily and gives a flimsy excuse.

### ACT II

## EXT. MONTEREY - NIGHT

They arrive in Monterey. Mitch refuses to stay at his parents' place. He's not ready to confront his issues with his father, plus his room there only has twin beds. Audrey doesn't see why that would even matter. She argues that his dad probably could use the company, but Mitch could care less. This doesn't bode well for Mitch being a family man. He offers to spring for a hotel room instead.

Camille informs Mitch she won't be staying with her father either. She's not on speaking terms with them either and she has to wait until the right moment to spring her trap on them. She reasons she'll share the hotel room with Mitch and Audrey. Mitch can't have that. But Camille threatens to tell Camille the truth if he doesn't cooperate. Mitch begrudgingly offers to get her a room to herself. He'll just have to go to the cheapest hotel he can find.

## INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Mitch was definitely hoping for something more romantic. This place is a dump.

Audrey sneaks in ahead of Mitch and Audrey. She bribes the CLERK into claiming they only have rooms with twin beds.

Mitch arrives, tries to book the rooms. He finds out about bed situation, but Audrey yawns -- she's too tired to go to another hotel. Mitch sucks it up, and hands over his credit card to pay for the rooms.

## INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mitch and Audrey settle into their room. Audrey tries to go straight to bed, but Mitch tries to bust out the wine, draw a bath for Audrey, play some romantic, etc. Audrey finds Mitch's attempts at romance odd considering he's supposed to be mourning his dead mom. She notes the name of the playlist Mitch has going: "Mom's Funeral Mix." Mitch awkwardly tries to explain why these baby-making songs remind him of his mom. Having had enough, Audrey turns out the light and rolls over in her twin bed. Mitch climbs into the same twin bed. Audrey protests. Mitch: "My mom just died. I don't want to sleep alone tonight." It's a new low for Mitch, but it works.

Mitch stares at the back of Audrey's head

INT. COLLEGE PARTY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Match cut to back of Audrey's head. Mitch at a Halloween party walks across the dance-floor, making a beeline for the back of her head. He's unmistakably dressed as Eminem. People dancing give him shit for his costume, but he doesn't care. He taps Audrey on the shoulder. She turns around to reveal... She's in black-face, dressed as Dr. Dre -- it's fate. She wears a N.W.A T-shirt with a giant pot leaf on the front. They hit it off immediately. Audrey explains her choice of costume -- "I already had the shirt, so..."

We see them dancing, then slow-dancing, then making out, then...

INT. DORM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

We see Mitch and Audrey, still in costume, having sex on the bed while lip-syncing along to "Forgot About Dre."

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The next morning in the hotel room. Mitch and Audrey couldn't look more uncomfortable in the twin bed. Mitch hogs the blankets. He wakes, throws on some clothes, and sneaks out of the room without waking Audrey.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Mitch helps himself to the continental breakfast. He stocks up on muffins and coffee to take back to Audrey. The clerk from the night before stops him. He informs Mitch that he is not welcome to the breakfast because his credit card was denied. Mitch owes them for a night in two rooms. The clerk threatens to call the cops. Mitch promises he'll get him the money if he just gives him half an hour.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Mitch sneaks back into his room with breakfast and coffee for Audrey. He leaves her a note: "Went to talk to dad. Be back soon." He grabs the engagement ring from his suitcase and Audrey's keys from the bedside table, and slips back out of the room.

INT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

Mitch pawns the ring. He struggles to get a decent price for it. The PAWN SHOP GUY scoffs at the quality of the diamond.

Mitch makes the guy promise not to sell it -- he's coming back for that ring soon. He holds on to the box, a consolation for getting screwed over on the price.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Audrey wakes up. She smiles as she reads the note and sees breakfast waiting for her.

INT. AUDREY'S CAR - DAY

As Mitch hurries back to the hotel, he thinks for a brief second he sees a sports car following him. But the sports car disappears, and Mitch shakes it off.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Audrey walks downstairs for a coffee refill. The clerk stops her. He gives her the same speech he gave Mitch about not being welcome to the continental breakfast. This is news to Audrey. She's displeased to hear about his credit card being denied. She offers to settle the bill with her own credit card.

Scott enters as the clerk is commenting on Audrey's name. He recognizes her name from talking to Mitch. He introduces himself to Audrey. They can't believe the coincidence. It turns out Scott owns the hotel -- it's his latest project. He tells the clerk that this one is on the house. Audrey is confused -- Mitch said he was going to talk to his dad. Scott does his best to cover up for his son. He thought they'd agreed for him to pick him up, he lies through his teeth.

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Mitch returns to find his mom in the passenger seat of his dad's car in the parking lot of the hotel. She's shocked to see him there but absolutely thrilled. He asks her what she's doing here. We cut straight to...

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Mitch enters the lobby, finds Audrey and Scott getting along fabulously over coffee. It's Mitch's worst nightmare. "There you are," Scott says, "I thought you said you wanted me to pick you up." Scott asks Mitch to relax and join them, he already took care of the bill.

Mitch pays his dad for room anyway. He refuses to be in debt to his dad.

Establish this hotel is where they will be holding the funeral.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

Michelle peers through windows of the hotel, trying to catch a glimpse of Audrey. She notices Dom sneaking around nearby. They make eye contact. Neither one has any reason to recognize the other, but both mark it as odd.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Scott asks Mitch to help him shop for coffins and headstones that day. Scott is genuinely reaching out to Mitch here -- sincerely trying to make time together before he succumbs to the cancer -- but Mitch, unaware, refuses. Audrey sees this as extremely cold. Mitch promises he's just not ready to make amends with his father, and he wants to take a little trip down memory lane and visit some of the places that are strongly connected to his mother in his memory.

INT. COFFIN STORE - DAY

Scott and Michelle shop for coffins and headstones. It's a morbid affair. Establish the opportunity for personal quotes on headstones.

EXT. VARIOUS - MONTAGE

Mitch takes Audrey to various spots that allegedly remind him of his mother. He tries to reconnect with Audrey, she's not feeling it. Camille may or may not be involved.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

When Mitch is out with Audrey and Camille on a trip down memory lane, the Buick Enclave finally breaks down (thanks to Mitch's tinkering earlier). Someone pulls up behind them. It's Dom. Only Audrey knows his face. Dom pretends to be a friendly stranger and competently fixes their engine. Camille finds him extremely handsome and flirts outrageously.

Audrey and Dom whisper together with the propped up hood blocking them from view. Dom apologizes for how he acted before.

He feared her supposedly sexless relationship might turn passionate again when they were forced to share such close quarters. She assures him nothing is going on-he can go home. Camille is more than a little turned off that Dom would follow her all the way here. Maybe he's not so stable after all...

Mitch finds the way this guy keeps eying him so hatefully suspicious and unsettling. He looks at the guy's license plate. It's a Colorado plate. But he said he's from XXXX. Mitch asks Dom about it, and he says it's a rental car. You keep tools in your rental car? Dom tightens his grip on the wrench threateningly. Mitch is sure this guy must be from the jewelry store coming to collect on the engagement ring since Mitch's backup credit card has been denied. Camille doesn't care who he is -- he's sexy and she'll have him.

Dom fixes the car. Of note: he identifies the problem as having to do with the exhaust manifold.

EXT. JULIA PFEIFFER BURNS STATE PARK, BIG SUR - DAY

Mitch and Camille take Audrey to the gorgeous state park they actually visited with their mother when they were younger. Something comes alive in Mitch. He loved this place as a kid, and he gets genuinely carried away talking about the things his mom taught him about in the park. Audrey likes this side of Mitch.

Mitch steps away to take a call from his father. Scott invites them to stay with him that night, he practically begs. Mitch refuses -- 1) He can't risk Audrey seeing Michelle, and 2) He still hates his dad. Scott offers to let them stay at the hotel free of charge, but Mitch won't take that offer either. Mitch notices a little outfitting store that advertises canoe, kayak, and tent rentals.

INT. SCOTT AND MICHELLE'S HOUSE - DAY

**Intercut with above during phone call, stay with Scott and Michelle after phone call.**

Scott and Michelle are watching old home videos of themselves, Mitch, and Camille from long ago. It's a portrait of a very happy family.

EXT. JULIA PFEIFFER BURNS STATE PARK, BIG SUR - DAY

Mitch returns to Camille and Audrey. He suggests they camp out on one of the little alcove beaches that night like they did with his mom. It would be really special for him, he says. Audrey, loving this side of Mitch, is on board.

MONTAGE

As the sun sets, they canoe to the alcove. They set up two tents. They get a fire going. Etc.

EXT. ALCOVE BEACH - NIGHT

Mitch, Audrey, and Camille camp out on their own private beach, tucked away in a small alcove. It's actually pretty damn romantic (too bad Camille is there). They have a fire roaring. They lie down and look at the stars. They share blankets. Etc. Mitch loves every moment of it.

EXT. ALCOVE BEACH - NIGHT

As the fire dies down, they notice someone peering out from around the side of their alcove at them. They yell at the person to come out. It's Dom. Again. He tries to play it off--"What are the chances?!" He lies that he travels from XXXX to camp here every year. Audrey is furious that he's still following them. Mitch is even more terrified that this guy is exactly who he thinks he is, and now that Dom's got them isolated out here, he can slit their throats and send them out to sea.

Dom comments on the extreme isolation of these beaches. That's what's so appealing about them. Mitch interprets this as a threat. He argues that the beaches aren't that isolated -- you never know when other people might show up, park rangers, coast guard, etc. Camille interprets Dom's comment as a come on. She pontificates about all the things a couple willing adults might be driven to do to one another's bodies in such extreme isolation.

Audrey gets a moment alone with Dom. She tells him to go home immediately. He implores her to consummate their love that night so he knows for sure that she wants him and not Mitch. Audrey, of course, says no way. He asks her if Mitch is really the kind of man she would marry. Audrey explain that Mitch isn't really that kind of guy, so Dom has nothing to worry about.

Dom wanders back to his own next-door alcove campsite. Camille watches him all the way.



They decide to turn in for the night. Mitch decides he's going to stay up and keep watch for a while, worried about Dom. Audrey, certain that Dom may be a little crazy but he's not a murderer, assures Mitch that it's just a coincidence (she doesn't know why Mitch thinks Dom is a murderer, she just knows he thinks Dom is dangerous). She tells him he's going to get cold and he needs his sleep, so just come in the tent. "Do you really want me to sleep in there with you?" he asks. "Yes, just come on." Mitch is optimistic that this is a good sign for him.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S TENT - NIGHT

Mitch tries to put some moves on Audrey. She rejects him, reasoning that his sister is just a few feet away in another tent.

EXT. ALCOVE BEACH - NIGHT

Camille quietly sneaks out of her tent in the sexiest outfit she could come up with and head's for Dom's alcove.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S TENT - NIGHT

Frustrated by Audrey's rejection, Mitch drifts off to sleep. Audrey lies awake, emotionally confused, staring at the tent's ceiling.

Audrey finds the engagement ring box. She never opens it, so she doesn't realize it's empty. The sight of the box throws her for a loop. She puts the box back where she found it. She sneaks away from snoozing Mitch and steps outside for some air.

EXT. ALCOVE BEACH - NIGHT

Audrey pulls out her phone. She dials "Mom." No cell reception. She'll need to get to higher ground.

She starts to climb up the alcove (WORTH NOTING AT THIS POINT THAT ALCOVE IS NOT THE RIGHT WORD, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS). She reaches the top.

EXT. BLUFFS - NIGHT

She calls her mom a second time. This time it goes through. We just hear Audrey's end of the conversation. She explains what's been going on with Mitch and Dom.

And now the engagement ring? Maybe she needs to follow up with this break up after all. She's torn.

She wanders as she talks on the phone. She comes to a vantage point where she can see down into Dom's alcove. "Mom, I've gotta go." She sees Dom and Camille getting physical under a small waterfall (or in his tent).

EXT. WATERFALL OR TENT - NIGHT

Camille and Dom go at it. Neither can really believe this is happening. "I don't even know your name," he says. "Camille Scarborough." He makes a joke about about Simon and Garfunkel's "Scarborough Fair." Camille doesn't get the reference. "How fucking old are you?" she asks.

Camille just can't resist those older men. "38." It's a huge turn on for Camille. She demands he tell her about being "old," about the eighties, etc. As Dom lists off mundane details about 401(k)'s, Ronald Reagan, and golf, Camille reaches new sexual peaks.

EXT. BLUFFS - NIGHT

Audrey has seen enough. She turns and hightails it back to her own campsite.

EXT. ALCOVE BEACH - NIGHT

Audrey climbs down back to her own campsite. She finds Mitch crawling out of their tent in a panic. He woke up and found her missing and was terrified that Dom had gotten to her. She explains that she couldn't sleep so she stepped out for some air. It's a huge relief to find her not murdered. They climb back into the tent.

INT. MITCH AND AUDREY'S TENT - NIGHT

Mitch and Audrey go back to sleep. Audrey lets Mitch hold her close as they drift off.

EXT. BEACH ALCOVE - DAY

The morning after. Camille sneaks back to their own campsite. Audrey knows what she's been up to all night, but Camille's wet hair pretty much gives her away. They pack up and head back into Monterey for the funeral.

INT. TRUCK STOP BATHROOM - DAY

Mitch, Audrey, and Camille try to wash off with paper towels and water from the sink in lieu of showers. They change into their funeral attire. Mitch prepares Audrey for a very small, intimate funeral. He says his mom was a very quiet woman (untrue) who kept to herself, and she didn't have many friends.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

**(Midpoint)**

Mitch, Audrey, and Camille arrive for the funeral. Immediately, it becomes apparent that this is not the small, intimate funeral Mitch promised Audrey. Tons of people dressed in black mill about the lobby and enjoy refreshments tended to by the clerk we met earlier. The doors to the courtyard where the memorial service will be staged have not been opened yet. Mitch stresses out. He didn't anticipate having to fool this many people. Acquaintances and family friends Mitch and Camille haven't seen in years approach them and offer their condolences.

Mitch introduces Audrey to people -- they're all very impressed with her. What are you doing with a loser like this guy, they joke. It stings.

Mitch finds his father and asks what's going on. Scott informs Mitch that Michelle won't let him open the doors until she can speak to Mitch. Mitch orders his dad to keep an eye on Audrey while he goes to talk to his mom.

EXT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

Michelle waits by her coffin. She's extremely dolled up. She makes another appeal for the open coffin. After some dancing around it, Michelle admits she wants people to be able to see how good she looks even in death. Mitch fumes, are you the reason why there are so many people here? "What did you do -- put a obituary in the paper?"

Off Michelle's guilty look...

INT. DINER - DAY

Dom, famished after a night of lovemaking, refuels with bacon and eggs. An elderly man next to him reads the obituaries. It seems like everyone he knows is dying.

Dom notices Michelle's obituary. He stares at the photo. Under the photo: "Michelle Scarborough."

QUICK POP: Dom and Michelle make eye contact as they both sneak around outside Scott's hotel.

Dom remembers the face and recognizes Scarborough as Camille's last name. He rips the obituary out of the paper. "Check please."

EXT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

Michelle hands Mitch the obit. He reads it aloud. Because Michelle wrote it herself, it's humorously over-the-top.

Mitch reasons with Michelle. Rather than lie in the coffin with her eyes closed, she should take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to watch her own funeral. He locks the coffin shut (the lock CLICKS distinctively), and instructs his mother to go hide in the laundry room where she can watch from the window. He explains the plan, which ends with them burying an empty coffin and wiping their hands clean of this whole thing.

"We're starting in XX minutes. If I catch you in that coffin, I'll make sure you're buried in it." Mitch says. He exits to return to the lobby.

Michelle unlocks the coffin. She climbs inside and shuts the door (lid?). We hear the CLICK of the lock falling into place.

INT. COFFIN - IT'S ALWAYS NIGHT IN A COFFIN

The glow of a cell phone screen illuminates Michelle's face in the darkness. She texts Camille (like a total mom): "Open coffin once ppl r in courtyard and we'll discuss reducing ur punishment..."

EXT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Camille receives the text. She scoffs, responds: "I don't think so."

INT. COFFIN - DAY, TECHNICALLY

Michelle receives her response. She tries to climb out of the coffin. The door/lid won't budge.

INT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

We see the coffin shake as Michelle tries to get out, the lock firmly in place.

INT. COFFIN - I'M OVER IT

Michelle, panicking, texts Mitch: "Plz hlp. Trapped in coffin. Ur sister's a bitch. Sry!!!! <3 mom."

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Mitch apologizes to Audrey for disappearing. He hears his phone vibrate. He's about to check it when ELISA (26) walks in. She's drop-dead gorgeous. Mitch looks like he's seen a ghost. "Shit."

Across the room, Scott has a similar reaction. Camille drops her drink -- something is about to go down here.

Mitch tries to lay low. Audrey demands to know what's wrong. He has no choice but to finally explain the reason for his beef with his parents...

# **THE GRADUATE IN REVERSE SEQUENCE**

We hear Mitch telling the story in voice-over. *On screen, we see it the way Audrey imagines it, which is classic scenes from "The Graduate," but with Scott as Mrs. Robinson, Elisa as Benjamin, and Mitch as Elaine.*

Mitch explains:

*Elisa was at her parents Christmas party. She was in a weird place. We see Elisa in a man's blazer and tie, just like Benjamin's in the movie. She sits in front of a fish tank, looking like a person who's in a weird place.*

*She met Scott at that party. One thing led to another... We see Scott in Mrs. Robinson's role when she traps and propositions Benjamin. Elisa reluctantly unzips Scott's slip, Scott stands naked before Elisa, etc.*

*And they started an affair. The rest of the time she was on Christmas break they spent sneaking away to a hotel room. We see Scott rolling up his stockings.*

*When Elisa went back to school, she met a boy -- Mitch. They went out on a date, at first it didn't really go well. We see Mitch in Elaine's clothes. Elisa takes him to a cabaret.*

*Mitch is miserable as a woman performs a trick involving tassels behind him.*

But then they really got along. Mitch fell for her hard. We see Mitch and Elisa enjoying each other's company at the drive-in.

But soon the unfortunate truth came out. Elisa's new boyfriend was her recent lover's son. We see Scott, teary-eyed and soaked from the rain. We see Mitch stunned by the truth. And Elisa, devastated to lose Mitch.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Mitch continues: The fucked up thing is his mom found out about the affair, and stayed with Scott anyway. His dad lost his job over it (Elisa was the daughter of his boss?). Mitch couldn't forgive either of his parents for it. He transferred to UC-Boulder, started supporting himself (incurring a lot of debt along the way), and never looked back. Then, he met Audrey.

Audrey notes the irony that Camille was cut off for sleeping with an older man. "Yeah, she finds it ironic, too."

Mitch and Scott make nervous eye contact. Who is she here for -- the father or the son? Elisa starts walking toward Mitch. Camille quickly excuses herself and heads for a side exit to outside. Audrey follows her lead and excuses herself next. No one wants to be here for what's coming. Scott acts busy.

Elisa makes it to Mitch. She offers her sympathy for his loss -- "She was a good woman."

INT. HOTEL - BATHROOM - DAY

Audrey hides in a stall, overwhelmed. She hears a couple women come in gossiping about how amazing Elisa looks.

EXT. HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

Camille starts to text a "Professor Hatcher" in her contacts: "I'm officially over you, Wayne. Tell your wife."

Dom whips into the parking lot. He's on a mission, but Camille quickly gets in the way. She's excited to see him ("I was just texting about you!") and is more than ready for round two, even at her mother's "funeral." She flirtatiously calls him a stalker (she has no idea how true it is). "

Your mom's not dead!" Camille, caught off guard, assures him that's not true. "I saw her. She's alive. What's going on here?" Camille tries to calm him down. She promises her mother is dead, and she can prove it.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Mitch talks to Elisa. By way of trying to be there for Mitch in his time of need, Elisa suggests that she made a mistake 5 years ago, and she should have never let Mitch get away. We get the sense that the last 5 years have not been good to her, and she's just deeply, deeply lonely. He doesn't know what to do with this information. Over Elisa's shoulder, Mitch spots Audrey leading Dom by the hand through the lobby and through the doors into the lobby. That baffles him even more.

Mitch starts to try to get away from Elisa to go check on what's going on with Dom and Camille, but Elisa "accidentally" spills her refreshment on him before he can escape. Elisa apologizes profusely. She whisks him away to the bathroom so she can get the stain out.

INT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

Camille and Dom stand before the closed coffin. Dom insists he saw the woman from the photo outside this very hotel just a day ago. Camille wishes it were true, but unfortunately, her mother is dead. She opens the coffin. Michelle plays dead. Scott can't believe his eyes. He could've sworn he'd seen this exact woman yesterday.

Camille makes a speech to her mother about how she wishes she could have been alive to meet the new man in her life -- his name is Dom and he's 38 years old, mother, deal with it. She rubs this relationship in her mother's face, strongly hints that she knows about the whole Elisa situation (who is here by the way). Camille says she just wishes her mom, wherever she is ("Knowing her, I wouldn't say Hell is out of the question."), would give her some sort of sign that she wants her to return to school in the fall. Michelle struggles to keep a straight, "dead" face. Camille closes the coffin and locks it back.

INT. HOTEL - BATHROOM - DAY

**Intercut with above scene.**

Mitch and Elisa enter the women's bathroom. Mitch is uneasy about being in the women's restroom.

To put his mind at ease, Elisa locks the door behind them so women walk in to find a man in there. Audrey lifts her feet up and watches all of this unfold from the crack in the stall.

As she's cleaning the stain, Elisa comes on to Mitch in her own unique way (not as aggressive as Camille would, savvy -- rather than making a move physically, she tries to set up a date in a couple days "if he needs someone to talk to"). To Audrey's relief, Mitch resists. He flees the bathroom, leaving Elisa alone and rejected.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Mitch races across the lobby and opens the doors to the courtyard.

INT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

Mitch walks in to find Camille and Dom standing in front of the closed coffin. Before he can ask Dom what he's doing here, the crowd from the lobby starts filing into the courtyard and taking their seats.

Camille leads Dom away to two seats in the back row.

INT. HOTEL - BATHROOM - DAY

Audrey exits the stall, smirks at Elisa, who is surprised anyone was in there. Audrey exits.

INT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

Audrey joins Mitch in the courtyard. He points out Camille and Dom in the back row. She's surprised to see Dom, but she tells Mitch not to worry about it right now -- it's his mother's funeral after all. They take seats in the front row. Elisa slides in and finds a seat to herself.

LATER: Scott gives the eulogy. It starts out a little morbid, but becomes sincere and touching. He plays a video he put together of home video clips -- Scott really put some effort into this (because being marked for death puts shit in perspective, you guys). He praises Michelle for being such a wonderful mother to their children. He calls her his best friend who stood by his side through thick and thin. Etc.



INT. COFFIN - DAY

Michelle listens to the eulogy from the darkness of the coffin. Again, her phone illuminates her face and we see Scott's speech has moved her to tears. She dials Mitch.

INT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

Mitch's phone starts vibrating in the middle of the eulogy. Audrey gives him a look -- *Silence that thing, this is a funeral.* Mitch pulls the phone out of his pocket. He sees "Incoming Call - Mom" in big letters, and quickly hides it from Audrey.

Camille leans on Dom's shoulder.

After the eulogy, some people stand to offer their own remembrances of Michelle. Eventually, Elisa stands. She speaks about how great of a woman Michelle was.

INT. COFFIN - DAY

Inside the coffin, Michelle can hear Elisa's voice and recognizes who it is. She's can't believe the nerve of this girl. She texts Mitch: "Let me out of this coffin! I'm gonna kill that c-word!!!!"

INT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

Everyone looks around, wondering where the laugh came from.

The service wraps up, and the pallbearers sweep the coffin away to the hearse.

INT. COFFIN - DAY

Michelle feels the coffin being carried away. Uh-oh.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Dom corners Audrey for a moment alone. He tries to tell her that he thinks something fishy is going on here. Audrey doesn't want to hear it. She tells him she saw him with Camille the night before -- "Say what you will about Mitch, but he would never do something like that."

Dom fires Audrey.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

A hearse and a limo wait outside to caravan to the cemetery. Mitch has to hand it to Scott -- he really went all out to make this funeral authentic. Scott tells his son not to mention it. Maybe Scott's eulogy had a little bit of an effect on Mitch? The family loads into the limo. Camille invites Dom to join them in the limo.

INT. LIMO - DAY

The limo pulls away. Camille introduces Dom as her new boyfriend. To Scott: "He's 38. You got a problem with that?"

Mitch's phone starts vibrating again. He pulls it out. It's Michelle again. He tries to quietly take the call. He pretends it's an employer calling with a job offer. Everyone is so proud of him for the great news, especially Aubrey.

On the other end of the call, Michelle whispers angrily to Mitch -- He better get her out of this goddamned coffin so she can murder Elisa. Mitch promises her he'll get her out before she can be buried, while still trying to sound like he's on the phone with an employer -- "You can count on me. I wouldn't want you to end up buried in paperwork. I'll take care of it, don't worry."

Slam cut to...

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

The coffin is lowered into the ground. Mitch: "Shit."

As the coffin disappears, we slowly see more and more of the headstone that was behind it. It's one of those "Companion Headstones." On the left side, where Michelle has just been buried, it reads "Michelle Scarborough 1959-2013." On the right side, it already reads "Scott Scarborough 1957-." A quote is engraved between the two names: "Some day they'll go down together / And they'll bury them side by side / To few it will be grief / To the law a relief / but it's death for Bonnie and Clyde."

Mitch is too distracted by the thought of his mother being buried alive to notice the quote. But Audrey can't look away from it, and it's enough to bring tears to her eyes.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Mourners head home. Scott steals a moment with Mitch -- "I can't believe we pulled it off." Mitch admits they didn't quite pull it off. He asks his dad to distract Audrey while he rescues his mom. How am I supposed to do that, he asks. Mitch instructs him to do whatever it takes.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Scott finds Audrey wiping tears from her eyes. The last few days have been a roller-coaster of emotion for her. Scott doesn't know how else to distract her, so he just asks her if she cares to join him for a walk and a joint. Ordinarily, Audrey would say no, but she could really use it right now, so she lets her hair down a little and reverts back to her college ways.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Mitch waits for everyone to disappear before he can rescue his mom. But as soon as the last person leaves, two grave-diggers (the seediest, sketchiest dudes imaginable) arrive with the backhoe to start filling the grave in. Mitch begs them to wait so he can just have another moment to mourn the deceased. They immediately suspect Mitch of being a necrophiliac -- apparently they're used to guys the same make as Mitch with the same excuses. They explain that if he wants "more time" with the deceased, then he needs to pay them \$50 like the rest of the guys always do. Mitch can't pay. They drop a backhoe shovel full of dirt into the grave.

INT. COFFIN - DAY

Michelle hears the dirt hit the coffin. She's freaking out.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Mitch comes up with a plan just in the nick of time. He makes a deal with the grave-diggers -- if they give him 15 minutes, he'll give them all of the jewelry off of the corpse, which will be worth far more than \$50, when he's done. They agree and walk away to give Mitch his privacy.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

On the other side of the cemetery, Audrey and Scott smoke a joint.

She asks about the Bonnie and Clyde quote from the headstone. Scott recounts the story of the first night he and Michelle met...

INT. COLLEGE PARTY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

As Scott tells the story, we see a scene very similar to when Audrey and Mitch first met as Dr. Dre and Eminem. Young Scott is dressed as Clyde Barrow, Michelle as Bonnie Parker -- it's fate. They hit it off and go to bed together.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Ever since that first night, Scott explains, he knew, no matter what happened, he and Michelle would spend the rest of their lives together.

Maybe Scott also sheds a little light on the Elisa situation here, expresses his regret, adores Michelle for staying with him for their children's sake (especially the younger child, Camille).

Scott offers to roll another joint. He pulls out a translucent, orange pill bottle filled with marijuana. Audrey notices the prescription label on the bottle. Scott says he has a bullshit prescription because of his insomnia, but Audrey can see right through him. The label is way more official-looking than what you'd get from a dispensary (keep in mind, she lives with stoners and used to be one herself). She presses him harder, until he finally confesses. He tells Audrey about the diagnosis he received and about how badly he's wanted to tell his son, but can't find the right moment. He just wants Mitch's forgiveness before he passes away.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Back at Michelle's grave, Mitch finally rescues his mom. She shields her eyes from the sunlight, gasps dramatically, bitches at her son for taking so long. Mitch demands she give up her jewelry. She's indignant. He threatens to shut her back in the coffin and call the grave-diggers to finish the job. She parts with all the jewelry, except for her engagement ring -- she's not willing to give that up for just anyone.

He sends his mom to go hide in the limo before anyone sees her.

INT. BUICK ENCLAVE - DUSK

Mitch drives because Audrey is extremely stoned. He's concerned about what happened between Audrey and Scott while Scott was supposed to be "distracting" her. Audrey is suspiciously quiet, and Mitch has been burned by his dad before. Plus, they were smoking together, which is very unlike Audrey...

She cracks. Scott wanted to tell Mitch himself, but she can't keep it in anymore. She delivers the news of Scott's cancer. It's a kick in the gut for Mitch. He takes deep breath, then a sharp turn.

EXT. SCOTT AND MICHELLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Buick pulls up outside Mitch's childhood home. Mitch and Audrey carry their bags to the door. Mitch lets himself in -- he knows where they hide the key.

INT. SCOTT AND MICHELLE'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

Mitch points Camille toward his bedroom. He goes to find his dad.

INT. MITCH'S OLD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Audrey enters the bedroom. It's been impeccably preserved by Scott and Michelle. She looks at a photo of a happier Scarborough family from years ago. Two twin beds sit on opposite sides of the room. She sits down on one of the beds by a window that overlooks the backyard swimming pool.

**PUTS SUITCASES IN CLOSET, ALMOST SEES MICHELLE.**

EXT. SCOTT AND MICHELLE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Mitch finds his Dad sitting by the pool. Mitch: "Did you get my text." Scott: "Your mom's in the pool-house for the night. I told her no lights." Establish Camille is staying with Dom at Scott's hotel for no charge. Her plan has worked (sort of). Mitch, still concerned that Dom is a hitman/debt collector, suggests that Scott have the hotel clerk check in on them every once in awhile.

They air it all out -- Elisa, the cancer, Mitch's troubles with Audrey, everything (in less than 3 pages).

Mitch decides to turn in for the night. He hugs his dad (or some other action which suggests the relationship is being repaired).

INT. MITCH'S OLD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Audrey witnesses the hug. She gets up from the bed and starts dragging it across the floor.

INT. SCOTT AND MICHELLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mitch wanders through the house and up the stairs toward his bedroom.

INT. MITCH'S OLD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mitch finds the beds pushed together in the middle of the room. Audrey lies under the covers.

**NEED TO GET MICHELLE TRAPPED IN CLOSET.**

Is this really happening? Mitch and Audrey have great sex. Audrey wonders if his parents can hear them. Mitch assures her their room is on the completely opposite side of this large house -- they're free to be as loud as they want. They eventually slip into rapping their respective parts from "Forgot About Dre," a throwback to when this relationship was perfect. They climax like no one has climaxed before.

Mitch is thrilled. His plan has worked. He won Audrey back.

INT. CLOSET - NIGHT

Intercut with above.

Michelle, trapped, overhears the entire thing. She's impressed.

INT. CLOSET - DAY

Michelle sleeps in the closet.

INT. MITCH'S OLD BEDROOM - DAY

Mitch and Audrey wake up together in a blissful state. It's an image of the couple we haven't seen before (except maybe in flashback). Audrey kisses her boyfriend before heading downstairs for some coffee.

Mitch tells her he's going to hop in the shower. "Suitcases are in the closet," she tells him.

Mitch gets out of bed, goes to the closet, opens it.

He finds Michelle asleep. She tries to explain herself. It's obvious she overheard them have sex. Michelle has completely changed her mind about Audrey -- she hasn't heard sex like that in years, these two are right for each other. Mitch is deeply disturbed that his mother listened to him have sex, but he's happy to have her back on his side.

Mitch asks for Michelle's engagement ring. This time, she happily slides it off her finger and hands it over. Mitch thanks Michelle, telling her he's going to propose that night at a dinner with the "whole family."

INT. TBD

Michelle voices her concerns to Scott: Mitch and Audrey's relationship might actually work out. On top of that, Scott and Mitch have mended their relationship. Michelle would love to be a part of it, but she's supposed to be dead. She makes up her mind to figure out a way to reenter Mitch and Audrey's lives. Scott agrees to help.

INT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Scott, Mitch, Audrey, and Camille all go out to dinner at a nice restaurant to celebrate the family being back together. Camille invites Dom to join them as her date. Audrey is fully aware that the only reason Dom agreed to be Camille's date is so he can keep an eye on Audrey and sabotage any progress Mitch has made with her.

Halfway through dinner, Mitch gets down on one knee. It looks like Audrey is going to say yes when Michelle arrives, claiming to be the deceased's sister. Dom recognizes Michelle. The dinner table descends into chaos as Mitch's lies finally catch up with him.

Dom is unbearably smug, having been proven right about Mitch. Camille is shocked to learn Dom's real identity, but also a little turned on by it (think Isla Fisher's reaction at a similar low-point in *Wedding Crashers*).

Mitch is hurt to learn of Audrey's lies about Dom, as well.

Audrey can't believe what she's seeing/hearing. What kind of person would fake his own mother's death? She leaves the restaurant in a hurry. Mitch chases after her.

EXT. UPSCALE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Outside the restaurant, by the Buick Enclave, Mitch catches up with Audrey. He begs for her to stay, apologizes. He tells her he stooped so low only because he loves her so much, and he wants to spend the rest of their lives together. He lets it slip that the job he supposedly was hired for yesterday was a lie also. Audrey, near tears, peels out of the parking lot.

### ACT III

DEPRESSED HALF OF MONTAGE

Smoking with dad.

Camille moves out of Mitch and Audrey's apartment in Boulder. She moves Mitch's things out for him.

Mitch sinks into the crack of his pushed together twin beds.

He gives Michelle her engagement ring back.

GETTING SHIT TOGETHER HALF OF MONTAGE

Camille back in school at UC-Boulder, eying one of her professors.

Mitch goes to chemotherapy with his father.

Mitch gets his own apartment.

Mitch taking over responsibilities at the hotel. We see him pouring his heart and soul into this place. He puts up a new sign: "Bonnie and Clyde's Hideout Hotel."

Mitch goes to the state park with his mom.

Mitch returns to the pawn shop. Gets the old ring back.

We see Scott's condition worsening.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Scott lies on a hospital bed. He doesn't look good. Mitch sits by his side.

Establish Mitch has taken over the hotel.



Scott explains that he and Michelle were never exactly right for each other, but they stayed together because they had kids -- it was too late. They did it for Mitch and Camille, and they're best friends because of the time and effort they put into raising kids together. Scott advises Mitch to remember it's not too late for him. He doesn't want to see him end up with the wrong person. Scott closes his eyes.

EXT. WHEREVER - DAY

Mitch calls Camille to break the news of Scott's death.

INT. BLAIR FINANCIAL - DAY

Reveal Camille working as Dom's new intern at Blair Financial. She's a terrible employee.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

The hotel is so much nicer now!

We see flower arrangements next to a black and white photo of Scott. This is his very real funeral.

Camille is in attendance. "Dom's sorry he couldn't make it. He sends his best."

Mitch approaches his mother: "Have you seen--" Michelle: "Car troubles." To busy to make a fuss, Mitch walks off to supervise his employees at the hotel (which includes the clerk). Michelle notices some grease on hands and wipes it off guiltily.

The doors to the courtyard are again closed. Mitch sneaks through them.

INT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

The casket is open. Mitch stares down at his father. It's emotional.

He hears a voice behind him, turns. Audrey stands in the open doorway. "What are you doing here?" Scott had a very big impact on her when the smoked together and she wanted to come pay her respects. Michelle invited her.

Michelle enters, admits this is true -- she's clearly up to something. Mitch suspects this is all just another fake funeral trick. He shakes his father. Nope, dude's dead.

Audrey notes how much better the hotel is looking these days. Mitch proudly tells her he's the new owner, offers to give her a tour.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The hotel room that Audrey and Mitch shared many nights ago. Mitch gives Audrey the tour. He has turned the hotel into a honeymooner's dream. It's the epitome of romantic. Each room has an iPod dock built into the walls so you can crank the sex jams (just like what Mitch wanted to do before!). There are no rooms with twin beds, only California kings. Each room comes with a complimentary bottle of champagne. He shows her the bathroom -- for this, he took some inspiration from a story his little sister told him. The shower has been turned into a waterfall a la the one from the state park that night.

Mitch optimistically asks how long Audrey will be in town. Establish Audrey took a job at another financial firm in Denver. The job is a huge step up for her, but she can't help feeling like something's missing. She's so married to her work that she never has any fun anymore. She has to get back to work for a big meeting by Monday.

Audrey is impressed with all the work Mitch has done. He admits he's bleeding money and going into debt (classic Mitch!), but hopes he can turn it around. Audrey offers to take a look at the books and see if she can help.

They return downstairs for the funeral to begin.

INT. HOTEL - COURTYARD - DAY

The wake begins. Audrey sits down beside Mitch in the front row. He looks a little nervous, but maybe it's just because he's about to give the eulogy...

Just then, Elisa walks in. She sits down on the other side of Mitch, kisses him on the cheek, and apologizes for being late ("Car troubles. Something with the exhaust manifold."). Audrey shares the same "um... wut?" expression as the audience. She looks to Mitch for some sort of explanation, but he's called up to deliver his eulogy before he can provide one for her. When he stands and approaches the pulpit, Elisa notices Audrey for the first time. Audrey looks down at Elisa's left hand -- she wears the engagement ring that Mitch bought back in Act I.

Mitch's eulogy turns into an appeal to Audrey, an appeal that Scott would admire because Mitch basically regurgitates the words of wisdom he's received from both Scott and Michelle.

The appeal ends with Mitch asking Audrey to get out of there with him. It works. Elisa is furious. Mitch and Audrey bolt, but not before Mitch whispers something in Michelle's ear. She smiles, nods, and slides her engagement ring off her finger and hands it over to Mitch.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY / INT. BUICK ENCLAVE - DAY

We see the same blissful scene that we saw in the "teaser." Mitch and Audrey wind their way along a remote road that hugs the side of a cliff. On the other side of the road, wave slam against rocks 100 feet below. Audrey wears the ring. They lean in for a kiss as they approach a sharp turn in the road, but nothing bad happens.

Then, we get to what we didn't see in the "teaser." They discuss how the only reasonable way to get out of their obligations -- Mitch to Elisa and Audrey to her work -- is to fake their own deaths. How romantic. Establish that Mitch informed his mother of this plan, if necessary.

They pull over to the side of the road. Roll down windows, rig the accelerator. Lastly, they set the ring in the passenger seat ("as evidence"). They send Audrey's most prized possession -- the symbol of her professional, stick-in-the-mud self -- off the cliff and plummeting into the ocean. They celebrate their victory.

As they walk away from the scene of the crime together arm and arm, their smiles begin to fade a la "The Graduate."

**THE END**